A NOTE ON THE TOPOGRAPHY OF ANCIENT RĀJAGṚIHA

By

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Rājagṛiha, which was the capital of the kingdom of Magadha from very early times, is represented by modern Rajgir in the south-eastern corner of the Patna District. Being the capital city of Magadha for centuries, it was known from time to time by different names. In the Indian literature it appears by several names such as Girivraja,[1] Rājagṛiha,[2] Vasumatī.[3] Kuśāgrapura,[4] Māgadhapura,[5] Bārhadratha-pura[6], and Bimbisārapura[7]. It was called Girivraja, because of its topographical situation. Girivraja means an enclosure of hills, or a pasture, or a fort in the middle of hills. It was a hill-girt city. According to *Sumaṅgalavilāsinī* it derived the name Rājagṛiha because of its being a royal seat.[8] Another interpretation is that Rājagriha means a prison for inimical kings. According to *Mahābhārata* Jarāsandha had imprisoned many kings. The *Rāmāyaṇa* calls it Vasumatī after the king Vasu, described as the founder of the city.[9] *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa* calls it Kuśāgrapura, which is referred to by Yuan Chwang as *Ku-She-Ka-lo-pu-lo* and explained as derived from the excellent growth of the *Kuśa*

1. *Mahābhārata, Sabhāparva,* XXI. 3; *Samyutta Nikāya,* II. 185.
2. *Mahābhārata, Sabhāparva,* XXI. 40, *Vanaparva,* VI. 82, 104.
3. *Rāmāyana, Bālakānda,* 32, 7.
4. *AMMK.,* LXIII; Watter's *Yuan Chwang,* II. 148-49.
5. *Mahābhārata, Sabhāpvrva,* XXI. 13.
6. *Ibid.,* XXIV. 44.
7. Law, B. C., *Life & Work of Buddhaghosha,* p. 87.
8. राजगहेति एवं नामके नगरे। तं हि मन्धातुमहागोविंदादीहि परिग्गहीतत्ता राजगह ति बुच्चति।
9. *Rāmāyana, Bālakānda* XXXII. 7,

   चक्रे पुरवरं राजा वसुर्नाम गिरिव्रजम्।

   एवा वसुमती नामवसोस्तस्य महात्मनः ॥

grass.[10] As the capital of Magadha, it was called the Māgadhapura, and as the residence of Bṛihadratha, it derived the name Bārhadrathapura. Jinaprabhāsūri refers to other names of the city as Kshitipratishṭha, Chaṇakapura, and Ṛishabhapura.[11] Though so many names are referred to, it is popular in the Indian literature by two names. i. e. Girivraja and Rājagṛiha.

Girivraja or Rājagriha had a peculiar geographical situation, which had added to its beauty. The *Rāmāyana* says, "It shines in the middle of the five hills".[12] The *Mahābhārata* says, "These five hills abounding in shaddy trees stand as if protecting the Girivraja. The city appears as if concealed in fragrant *Lodhra* forests and abounding with the *Pippala* and *Nyagrodha* trees."[13] Buddhaghosha describes the city as a *Giriparikkhepa*—a girdle of hills.[14] Fa-Hien refers to the city as a circular space formed by five hills which stand all round it, and have the appearance of the sub-urban wall of a city.[15] Yuan Chwang describes it as the centre of Magadha, its old capital, the mountain city, having high hills forming its outer walls.[16]

According to one list of the *Mahābhārata* these five hills surrounding Girivraja were Vaihāra, Varāha, Ṛishabha, Ṛishigiri, and Chaityaka;[17] and according to other, Pāṇḍava, Vipula, Varāha, Chaityaka, and Mātaṅga. According to the Buddhist literature the five hills

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10. Watter's *Yuan Chwang* II. 148.

11. Law, B. C., *Rājagriha in Ancient Literature*, p. 2.

12. *Rāmāyana*, *Bālakānda*, 32. 7.

एते शैलवरा: पंच प्रकाशंते समंतता ।

13. *Mbh.*, *Sabhāparva*, XXI. 3,

एते पञ्चमहाश्रृंगा: पर्वता: शीतलद्रुमा: ।

रक्षन्तीवाभिसंहृदत्य संहताङ्गा गिरिब्रजम् ।।

14. Law, B. C., *Rājagriha in Ancient Literature*, p. 21.

15. Legge's *Fa-Hien*, pp. 81-82.

16. Watter's *Yuan Chwang*, pp. 148, 156.

17. *Mbh.*, *Sabhāparva*, XXI. 2.

वैहारो विपुल: शैलो बराहो वृषभस्तथा ।

तथा ऋषिगिरिस्तात् शुभाश्चैत्यकपञ्चमा: ।।

were Isigili, Vebhāra, Pāṇḍava, Vepulla and Gijjhakūṭa.[18] Modern names of the hills around Rajgir are Vaibhāra, Vipula, Ratna, Chhaṭṭhā, Śaila, Udaya and Sonā. Vaihāra is described as *Vipula Śailo*, hence Vaihāra and Vipula are identical, and the same as modern Vaibhāragiri, described in the *Jaina* inscriptions as Vaibhāra and Vyahāra.[19] Yuan Chwang calls it *Pi-Pu-lu*=Vipula.[20] The Chinese pilgrim tells us that once there had been 500 hot springs among which he saw several scores, some cold and some tepid.[21] Buddhaghosha associates hot springs with mt. Vaibhāra.[22] Hence *Pi-Pu-lu* of Yuan Chwang is Vaibhāragiri of today. Though it is difficult to identify ancient hill names, Dr. B. C. Law has identified them as Pāṇḍava=Vipula; Vepulla=Ratnagiri and Chhaṭṭhāgiri; Gijjhakūṭa=Udayagiri; and Isigili=Sonāgiri.[23]

Rājagṛiha was beautified by several delightful spots and parks such as Venuvana, Gijjhakūṭa, Moranivāpa, Pavārikāmravana on the bank of the Sappiniyā river, Tapodārama, Jivaka's Āmravana, Sītavana, Maddakuchchi, Gotama-nigrodha Chorapapāta, Sattapaṇṇiguhā, and Kāla-silā in Isigili.[24] These spots were visited not only by the citizens of the city, but also the wandering ascetics who used them as halting places. The Buddha also lived in most of these spots.

During the days of the Buddha, Rājagṛiha was called the Girivraja of the Magadhas. It was thus distinguished from the Girivraja of the Kekayas. Fa-Hien[25] and Yuan Chwang[26] speak of the old and the Now Rājagṛiha. The former says that he visited New Rājagṛiha built by Ajātaśatru, which was a *yojana* to the west of the Village Nāla, the birth place of Sāriputta where he saw two monasteries. Huen Tsang records two traditions about the building of New Rājagṛiha. According to one, Bimbisāra built it, but the other tradition describes Ajātaśatru as the builder of New Rājagṛiha.[27]

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18. *M. N.*, III. 68.
19. Cunningham, *Ancient Geography*, p. 530.
20. Watter's *Yuna Chwang*. II, p. 153.
21. *Ibid.*
22. Law, B. C., *Rājagriha in Ancient Literature*, p. 6.
23. *Ibid.*
24. *DN*. I. 49; II. 116-17; *Dia*. III. 123, *SBE* XI. 56; *MN*. I. 497, II. 1-22, 29-30, III. 13, *AN*. II. 29, 176, V. 196.
25. Legge's *Fa-Hien*, pp. 81-82.
26. Watter's *Yuan Chwang*, II, 161-62.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 162.

There are difficulties in accepting the tradition which describes Ajātaśatru as the builder of New Rājagṛiha, because he is known for the fortification of Pāṭaliputra. It is suggested that no new Rājagṛiha was built and that New Rājagṛiha is nothing but Pāṭaliputra.[28] Dr. B.C. Law suggests that New Rājagṛiha was nothing but the palace area.[29] The building of Rājagṛiha on a new plan is not unlikely. The plan of Rājagṛiha corresponds with the plan of the cities of Northern India of the 6th century B. C.[30] The Buddist literature describes Mahāgovinda as the architect who planned Rājagṛiha and other cities of Northern India.[31] Rājagṛiha, known as Bimbisārapura also gives the suggestion of its being rebuilt by Bimbisāra. Hence, the possibility of the building of Rājagṛiha during the days of Bimbisāra on a new plan, cannot be put aside. But Carbon-14 dating of the New Fort at Rājagṛiha establishes that it was founded during the later Mauryan period,[32] which makes the building of a new Rājagṛiha either by Bimbisāra or Ajātaśatru quite unlikely. It may be concluded that Bimbisāra might have introduced certain changes in the old city, and that the site was not shifted to the fort area.

Buddhaghosha speaks of the inner and the outer cities of Rājagṛiha.[33] Probably the inner city was the palace area which is described by Fa-Hien as the old city of king Bimbisāra,[34] and as the Kuśāgrapura by Yuan Chwang.[35] The *Rājovāda Jātaka* describes the outer city as consisting of localities at the four gates (*Chatudvāragāma*).[36] According to Buddhaghosha Rājagṛiha had 32 main and 64 minor gates.[37] But infact there were four main gates as suggested by various sources.[38] The ruins at modern Rājgir show that Rājagṛiha was protected by a strong rampart, with a circuit of about thirty-three miles. In the south-west corner of the fortified area was a citadel, protected by a stone wall, portions of which are still fairly well preserved.

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28. Law, B. C., *Rājagriha in Ancient Literature.*
29. *Ibid.*
30. Percy Brown, *Indian Architecture.*
31. *Vimānavathu Comy.*, p. 82.
32. *Indian Numismatic Chronicle*, Vol. III, part II, p. 139.
33. *Sāratthapakāsimi*, I, p. 313.
34. Legge's, *Fa-Hien* p. 82.
35. Watter's, *Yuan Chwang* II. 148.
36. *Jātaka*, II. 2.
37. Law, B. C., *Rājagriha in Ancient Literature*, p. 24.
38. *Ibid.*, pp. 24-25.